BEFORE THE FALL

X-MEN

BEFORE THE FALL

THE HERALDS OF APOCALYPSE

MARVEL

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[_of_X]

001

EWING
PIZZARI
LANDINI
PIMENTEL
DE LA CRUZ

AMENTH.

Tell me what *strength* is.

...
Please. *Please* tell me.
Great Apocalypse...
That is a corrupted name.
Mangled by history.
Once, yes, it pleased me that my name meant ***final destruction...*** but the time for such blunt concepts has *ended.*
And so, I am...
...a more *ancient* word with more resistant *meaning.*
"Revelation."
For I *am* the Revelator and have *always* been so.
As was *revealed-- so I shall reveal.*
Yes. *Please,* Lord.
"The strong will survive." That is the word from on high.
I want to survive. *How do I survive?*
What is strength?

If the strong *survive*...then the *measure* of strength *is survival.*

But *understand:* survival has no *moral* component.

Heroes *die.* Brave hearts *break.* Paradise is *lost.*

The numinous is *denied* by *small souls* or *betrayed* by *despots.*

The *alchemist's gold* is pulled from *heaven*...to make *currency.*

Consider a rock battered by the ocean for a million years. It is *worn*-- but *whole.*

Is a rock *noble?* Can a rock be *moral?*

A rock is *there.*

As I was there.

And *this* is the revelation as it was revealed to *me.*

It is not *enough* only to be *there.*

It is not enough only to be strong.

...

Well, thanks for nothing, big man.

BLURK!

You shouldn't talk to them.

...

You reforged the *family sword*...

Don't change the subject, my love. You've become a *lecturer* on your island of the weak. *But I still teach by example.*

The strong *survive.* Those who *surrender* will survive-- *in my army.* So what is strength?

Strength is *surrender to me.*

As it *always* was.

My *heart* knows it, Genesis.

But a *world* is not a lover's heart. I cannot *support* this course.

I cannot walk with you.

I have never asked you to, my *gentle* one. My mage of *mercy.*

But you will *open the way.*

And if I choose *not to?* Your armies will not persuade me.

Nor your *White Sword,* nor his *Hundred,* nor my *own children...*

...nor *anything that you hold.*

THUNK

Then *I* will persuade you.

And if *you* wish to persuade *me...*

...defend your position *well,* my love.

Make your arguments *clean* and *precise.*

For I will not hold back.

THAP

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HERALDS OF APOCALYPSE

WAR AND PEACE

A millennium ago, Apocalypse ruled over the ancient mutant land, Okkara, along with his wife, Genesis. Together, they defended Okkara and lead the mutants against the Amenthi horde who besieged them. To end that war, Genesis made a deal with the dark elder god of Amenth, Annihilation, donning the Annihilation helm to take control of the horde and ultimately splitting Okkara into two parts: Krakoa and Arakko, and separating Genesis and Apocalypse from one another.

During the Tournament of Swords, Genesis and Apocalypse faced one another again on opposite sides of a battlefield, and Apocalypse was able to remove the Annihilation helm from Genesis, freeing her of its influence and forcing back an encroaching force of Amenthi bent on Krakoa's destruction. Saturnyne was able to convert the Annihilation helm into a staff to limit its corrupting influence over Genesis. In the aftermath of the battle, Genesis demanded that Apocalypse return to Amenth as a show of good faith between Krakoa and Arakko.

But peace can only last for so long -- and the Arakkii are made for war.

[APOCALYPSE]

[ISCA THE UNBEATEN]

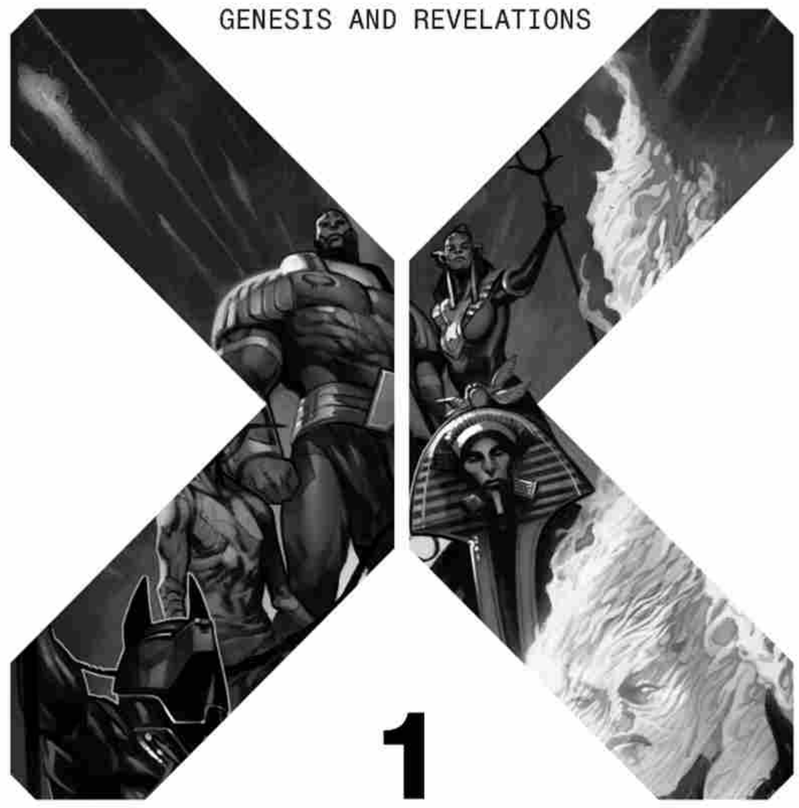
[PESTILENCE]

[GENESIS]

[WAR]

[FAMINE]

GENESIS AND REVELATIONS



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OKKARA.
In a time long past.
A truly *magnificent* gift, Isca.
I cannot thank you enough.
It comes apart and locks together again so *seamlessly*--and yet the balance is *exquisite*...
Like your new family. *Four* strong children now--and together, *what won't they achieve?*
I challenged the swordmaker *Ingios* to see who could forge the better weapon--so it's *better than the best.*
Though he's not the swordmaker his *mother* was. This won't beat the white sword she made for *his* birth.
Except as an ornament of *exquisite beauty*...
...which is all a sword *should* be--in a time of *peace.*
"Peace."

Peace is not the *natural condition*, my husband.

I am a *living weapon*, and so are you. So is my *sister*. So is *every mutant on Okkara.*

And *all* weapons were made for the *battles* to come.

And if the battle *never* comes, my love?

Can the weapon not become something *more?*

The name of the child will decide the name of the *sword*, sister Genesis.

Have you *decided* yet?

...

Death.

The child's name is *Death.*

Famine.

War.

Pestilence.

And Death.

You don't like the names?

I like them *very much*--as well you know.

You know where I came to Okkara *from.*

A land where *pain* is harnessed to build great *monuments* to the *denial of fate...*

My children are *my* monuments--built from *love,* not pain. *My* denial, in the face of what I am told must be.

Each named for a concept *lost to the past.*

We feed the land, and the land feeds us. Where is there *famine?*

Our healers love and play among their people. Where is there *pestilence?*

Our swords are forged in celebration. Where is there *war?*

Where is there death?

Oh, my poor love. Where is it *always?*

Not forgotten in the past. *Waiting in the future...*

Waiting to strike.

At night, I dream of a sword--one not made for bright days, but to *herald* the *night.*

I dream of it *splitting paradise in two...*

...opening the door to *annihilation.*

And I dream that this is *more* than a dream.

And so, I named our children. Not in denial, but in *recognition*--of what they must *face, overcome* and then *become.*

What they must be strong to *survive*--for *only the strong survive...*

On *that,* we are of one mind, wife.

But can strength never *rest?* Does survival have *no ending?*

Can there be no time of...

Of...

...what is that light?

The New History of Arakko

Chapter 1

Once I was lost, now I am found, and this is my story.

First there was Okkara, the one land of mutants.

It was ancient before that word existed -- but not yet old, in the way we are now old. Nor would it become so; for the birth of what is now came with the death of what was then.

For on the far side of the sky, in the opposite-lands, there was Amenth, the blood-red world, where the hardiest daemons were separated even from their own kind by gulfs of screaming void — and by their ruler, the cold gold helm Annihilation.

From whence did Annihilation come? From what high darkness, what dread branch of the anti-tree did the golden helm descend? Even now, all we have are whispers. We only know that Annihilation saw the one land... and saw that it could be taken.

That it could be of use.

So Annihilation studied us... and in the sword Purity, that was the very act of cutting, saw the key.

So the Twilight Sword was forged, to tear the way between realities. And it tore the very land asunder, so that what was one became two -- and from the chasm between them, the enemy poured into this world.

The war began with a single scream.

CLANGG

Do you remember how you *screamed*, husband? In that single endless moment when the *Twilight Sword* cleaved the land in two?

I will *never forget*...

Nor will I.

It was not a squeal of *fear*.

Nor a howl of *pain*--

--though their blades bit *deep* as you shielded the children.

It was a scream of *rage* and *despair*...

You remember it *well.*

Rage that paradise had been sundered--and ***despair*** that it would ***always be so.***

That I had been forcibly awoken from a ***beautiful dream***--the dream of ***peace***--and would never know sleep again.

What you heard was the ***burning of my soul.*** And I took that raw flame in my hands...

"...and gifted it to our enemies.

"We fought ***against all hope***--for a day, a month, a year.

"If the boy ***Blue***--his power woken by ***grief,*** his dead father's ***sword*** in his hand--had not raised his Hundred and ***charged*** the rift...we would have ***fallen.***

"As it was, the years passed, and we ***fought on...***"

And my ***sister*** fought by our side--never losing, nor losing heart. Our ***children*** grew to be ***warriors.***

They were years of ***glory,*** husband.

They were.

And do you remember how they ***ended,*** my love?

Of course I do.

We ***won.***

"And the enemy came to us, *begging bowl in hand...* to *parley.*"

I would like to make an offer...

...to you strong mutants of great quality.

So make it.

If only I could simply... *give it to you.* But generosity is nowhere to be found in my nature.

Sincerity, however, is...

...I want you to earn it.

Allow me, my love.

NO. *They are mine.*

"I recall the *precision* of your strikes... the subtle *surgery* of your roots and vines as they threaded daemon bones, *feeding on the marrow.*

"I recall a conscious choice *not to blink--* for *that* is how fast your victory was.

"And I recall the Annihilation helm making its *offer-- to you and you alone--*"

--but not *what* it offered. Nor your *answer.*

You kept that to yourself.

The knowledge might have *broken* you, husband. And *then,* I needed you *whole.*

But *now?*

"Perhaps it's time for you to *learn.*"

Genesis of the Broken Land. Hear my words in your mind-- *open yourself to them.*

For I come to you now as a *friend.*

Do you, now?

Do I not?

Have I not made you a ***warrior-queen,*** when once you were a ***paranoid outsider?*** Have I not given you the times for which you were ***born?***

Have I not reforged your ***husband,*** back to the ***merciless blade*** that came to you from the desert lands? Undone the peace that ***blunted*** his sharp edges?

Have I not built ***heroes*** from your ***children?*** A ***legend*** from your ***sister?*** A ***glorious myth*** from your ***country?***

Have I not made ***all of your dreams come true?***

And at what ***cost?***

The weak were ***winnowed.*** The strong ***survived***--and ***thrived.*** Is this ***not*** your ***philosophy?***

And so... ***here*** is my offer, Queen of Strength and Glory. For ***your ears alone.***

I will ***seal*** the rift.

If you ask me to.

That is *all* I must do?

Ask?

I require no *abasement* or *humiliation*. I do not even need a *"please."*

Ask-- and the rift is *closed.*

The war *will end here*. With nothing further *lost...*

...nor won.

Only *ask.*

And what of the lost hundred?

What of our dead?

What of payment for your crimes--

We both know that there is only *one* question truly in your heart.

If the war does *not* end... *if the rift remains open...*

Stop.

...can you win?

Peace.

The dream was real.

We had *peace.*

In our hands. *Paid for with blood.*

Okkara... had *peace...*

...and you *refused* it--

I *did.*

And I was *right* to...

SHLUCK

...because we were not made for peace.

Hnnnh--

And you *insult* yourself by pretending anything else.

By pretending--with your *great hindsight*--that if it were *you*, you would have taken *another road.*

I *know you better,* husband. And I think *more* of you.

You are of *Arakko*--as I am. And in the *broken land,* we *fight.*

As *you* would have fought.

Yes.

Yes, I would have fought.

For their *crimes,* for our *justice,* I would have fought. *Even knowing I would lose*...I would have fought.

Even knowing the *cost*... Do you *remember,* my love?

What it cost?

The New History of Arakko

Chapter XXIII

What was the cost? The cost was simply this, and this alone: Surrender.

Not to the golden helm — not yet. This was surrender to fate; to what was, and what had to be.

Could there have been reconciliation? Could there have been healing and peace? We will never know. Isca's betrayal, so soon after the parley -- the knowledge that the war as it then was could not be won -- created the necessity of action.

And so, what should never have been cleaved in two was now separated forever.

Husband from wife.

Parent from child.

Arakko from Krakoa.

In time, the final war would be fought and won, in the contest of swords that freed our land from Annihilation for the first time -- forging the golden staff from the golden helm. In time, Genesis would return to Amenth as a conqueror, and tame those lands for her own — and for the staff in her hand.

Those chapters of Arakko's great story I will relate in my own time and at my own pace. But for now, know this:

These two could never truly be one again.

I know, husband. I was there.

And I could ask the same of you.

You sent the broken land to Earth--to coddled Krakoa. Your decision, my love, no other's.

What did you truly intend? For the strong to conquer the weak? For the weak to worship the strong, as we came to them in all our majesty?

You know what I intended. To force growth.

To force a necessary change...

And that was a noble aim, my philosopher.

But remember-- I saw the results.

AMENTH.

In recent times, after the contest of swords, the return to Amenth and the taming of the Summoner-Lands.

We *yield.*

The remaining ***Amenthi Summoners***--and those daemons in our power and not suborned to ***Blightspoke***--are once more in service of ***Genesis...***

...and ***Annihilation.***

Good boy. I ***dislike*** killing Summoners.

Be ***careful,*** my sister. ***Sentimentality*** is a condition ***difficult*** to ***remedy,*** once it takes root in the heart...

And surrender, just like that? No threats or curses spat?

How ***sad,*** old mage. How ***flat.***

When the wind changes, do we *curse the wind?*

Once, the *helm* commanded us...now, the *staff.*

Neither power is to be resisted *long*...hm?

There is no need to resist an *ally,* ancient one.

Nor a *servant*...

Servant.

Yes. As *we* now are...your *servants.*

So the wind blows. But *who knows?*

What?

Tarn is *dead?*

Perhaps the outcome would be *different* had *Tarn the Uncaring* lived to see this day--

We felt his passing in our bones. And the *news* of it reached us through our *once-comrades,* toiling in the Blightlands for Saturnyne's coin.

His chosen--*the Locus*--mourn him still, sealed in the *Spire Vile* on the world of Arakko, as they continue his work in his name...

The *world* of Arakko?

Then as we have conquered *Amenth,* mutants have now *conquered the Earth...?*

NO.

A *different* path was taken.

I have watched the Krakoans--*my other children*--in scrying fields and gossamer globes, by the *old magic.*

They could not *join* with Arakko--too long had passed. But together--*entwined in purpose*--there could be *growth.* A *change* to the stagnant status quo.

Old *death...* to *new life.*

I thought we were *one family* again, Father. And yet you keep *secrets...*

So what transpires *now* on this world of Arakko, husband?

Would we *approve?*

...

Our people continue to be *tested*--

He lies.

An *astral spirit*--

Your people are not *being* tested. They have *already* been tested--and they *failed.*

I am *Marianna Stern* of *Coven Akkaba*-- and I expended a great deal of my *magic* to project myself before you, great lady.

I would expend *more*-- to show you the truth your husband *hides*...

Akkaba.

She is of *Orchis*-- old foes in new guises. Attend her words as you would a *serpent's*...

If she has survived so long as *your* old foe, she *should* be attended to--for she has *surely earned* the *right.*

Unless it is an *easy* thing to survive the *wrath* of *En Sabah Nur*...?

It should be *impossible* to confront an *Omega of Arakko* and *survive*-- and yet, *behold.*

Behold the *death of history* and the *defilement* of the *Once-Great Ring.* The end result of the *contamination* brought by your husband's chosen people.

Behold *Uranos.*

"It took an *outsider* to show me the truth you hid.

"What was I to do *then?* What else *could* I have done?

"I *reforged our swords.* I gathered the last of our *children*-- the vampire lands of Sevalith did not wish my son to leave them, but I was *persuasive*--

"--and *then?* With my *family* around me and the daemons of a hundred *Amenthi Summoners* at my back?

"I confronted the only enemy *remaining*-- the *White Sword*--in his ancient Spire. And I *humbled* him and made his Hundred *mine.**

"And while I did *all of these things*-- while I took *necessary action*--what did *you* do, my husband?

"What did you do, besides *prepare for my return?*"

*See X-Men Red #12. --JDW

I chose you long ago. I choose you *still.*

But though you were the *living Apocalypse* to your weak Krakoans...of the two of *us?*

You will *always* be the Mage. *And I will always be the Warrior.*

And so you must *yield.*

Open the way, my husband. I know you *have* that power...

I do, my love. In *that,* you are correct.

But I am *more* than Mage.

I am *mutant...*

...and I come *armed.*

I can control every *atom* of my own body. That is my gift--*my mutant weapon.*

But the true measure of *strength*--to my philosophy--is not the weapons you can *summon...*

...but the pain you can survive!

There you are, husband.

At last...

There I *am*, wife.

But it is not *enough* only to be *there*.

It is not enough only to be *strong*.

So I lay *down* my swords--as I did on the *plains of Otherworld*--to save us all.

I *yield*... on my *own terms*.

THUKK

You have persuaded me. If our *reasons* to act differ, that matters *less* than the *necessity for action.*

Mutantkind will not survive the fire to come without *Arakko*--and Arakko must thus be *tested*... and *tempered in the flame.*

And as you *said,* my love-- I *prepared for your return.*

Millennia of mutant magic, contained in *three seeds*...

...the *okkara gates.*

One, I give to *you,* Genesis--to *use as you will.*

One, I will keep for *myself.*

And one, I plant *here*... in my own *blood.*

Blood is what the seed must *feed* on...

...for mutant blood has *always* been the cost of mutant power.

Thank you, my love.

Will you come *with* me?

No.

As I said--I *cannot* walk this path at your side any more than *you* could keep from walking it.

But there is one thing I ask. If this is *truly* your path...

...walk it alone.

NO.

Goodbye, husband.

Until we *meet again.*

...Is she *gone?*

Yes.

Okay. I'm getting up.

Good thing I don't keep much *brain* up here. I might keep this *knife* though.

How did I *do,* teacher?

You *survived.*

Join me if you like. I have my *own path* to walk--my own *forces* to gather.

But soon, our destinies will cross *again* on the battlefields of Arakko...*and my love will test me once more...*

You? You're the *Big A*-- top of the alphabet.

You think *you* need testing?

We *all* do, little daemon-- the strong most of all.

For to face the test is to face the *revelation...*

...and the Revelation never ends.

[XMBTF_[0.01]

X-LIFE

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